

Improving the Lives of California's Children and Families

CHILD WELFARE IN CALIFORNIA Facts at a Glance

- Nearly 650,000 children come into contact with California's child welfare system each year. On any given day, approximately 200,000 children are in contact with the child welfare system.¹
- Almost 20% of California's children are referred to child welfare services at least once during the first seven years of life. More than 3% will have spent some time in foster care.²
- For Black children the level of child welfare contact is very different. By their seventh birthday, almost 40% have been referred to child welfare services and nearly 10% placed in foster care.²
- On any given day in 2007, more than 75,000 children are in child welfare supervised foster care. That compares to 108,000 children who were in foster care in 2000.¹
- Of the children in foster care, roughly 23,000 will reunify with their parents and 7,000 will be adopted over the course of a year.¹
- Most children entering foster care (81%) were removed from their homes for neglect-related reasons.¹
- Of children who enter foster care, roughly 50% are age 5 or younger.¹
- Every year, California county child welfare agencies receive **nearly** one-half million reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. Of these referrals, the vast majority of cases receive no services, despite assessments that indicate families would benefit from services and support to prevent child abuse and neglect.³
- Approximately one-third of telephone hotline referrals are re-referrals of the same families from the previous year.⁴
- Many children cycle through the foster care system more than once and experience multiple placements. In 2007, 17% of children who have been in care for less than one year have already experienced three or more placements. Of those children who have been in care for two years or more, over 65% are in at least their third placement.¹
- Of all children who first entered foster care in 2000, five years later 56% had reunified, 19% had been adopted, 9% had exited to legal guardianship, and 9% were still in care.^{1,5}
- Approximately 45% of children in California's foster care system have been in care for over two years. The longer these children remain in care, the lower their likelihood of reunification. For these children, other forms of permanency such as adoption and legal guardianship are often required.¹
- In 2007, of all children first entering foster care in California, approximately 20% had a first placement with a relative caregiver. Of all children in out-of-home care in California, 36% are

currently placed with a relative. Children placed with relatives are more likely to be placed with their siblings and less likely to have multiple placements.¹

- The federal system for funding child welfare services at the state and county levels provides openended funding for children and youth who are in foster care, but caps funds for prevention and early intervention efforts. These funding restrictions result in the states and counties having significantly more funds available for placing children into out-of-home care - as opposed to funding programs that could reduce the need for child welfare services in the first place.
- National and other studies show that of youth who emancipate from foster care:
 - 75% work below grade level⁶
 - 46% do not complete high school⁷
 - 51% are unemployed⁷
 - 10 to 25% are homeless⁷
- In 2006, 7% of California's children were Black, but this group constituted 15% of maltreatment referrals and 27% of children in child welfare supervised foster care.¹
- Black children in California are more likely than White or Hispanic children to be reported for abuse and, if reported, are more likely to be placed in foster care. They are also less likely to be reunified than children of other races.¹
- Of those children who emancipate or turn age 18 while still in foster care, over 60% have been in care for three years or longer.¹
- Over the last several years, California has made statewide improvements on a number of outcome measures. However, there is significant performance variation among individual counties.
- For additional information, please see: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/

¹ Needell, B., Webster, D., et. al., (2007). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved [December 5, 2007], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/>

² Shaw, T. & Magruder, J. (in press). Children ever in care: An examination of cumulative disproportionality, *Child Welfare*.

³ California Department of Social Services, *Child Welfare Data Analysis Bureau. 2000-2006 Child Maltreatment Reports*.

⁴ California Department of Social Services, Re-referral Trend Implications 1999-2001 (Research conducted with standardized decision-making counties).

⁵ Please note that this is based on a 6 month cohort of children first entering foster care between July and December 2000.

⁶ Taylor, J. (1973). *Remedial education of children in foster care*. Child Welfare, Vol. 52.

⁷ Cook, R. (1992). A national evaluation of Title IV-E foster care independent living programs for youth: phase 2, Rockville, MD: Westat.